

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

15 September 2020

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Masud, Noreen (2020) 'Lear's leftovers.', *Victorian poetry*, 58 (2). pp. 207-220.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/768705>

Publisher's copyright statement:

© West Virginia University.

Additional information:

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Lear's Leftovers

NOREEN MASUD

In an affectionate letter of 1871, Edward Lear woos his friend Chichester Fortescue by playacting the careful housewife:

if you come here directly, I can give you 3 figs, and 2 bunches of grapes: but if later, I can only offer you 4 small potatoes, some olives, 5 tomatoes, and a lot of castor oil berries. These, if mashed up with some crickets who have spongetaneously come to life in my cellar, may make a novel, if not nice or nutritious Jam or Jelley. Talking of bosh, I have done another whole book of it . . .¹

If Fortescue comes late, Lear signals, his host will have to scour the larder for odds and ends, mixing the remnants of a salad with some household pests to make a solid (if not respectable) meal. It is a game that Lear, and the characters in his verse, love playing: “The Two Old Bachelors” (1876) involves a search for Sage and Onion, to combine with a serendipitously-found Mouse and Muffin, for dinner, while “The New Vestments” (1876) revolves around a “purely original dress” made from dead mice, biscuits and cabbage-leaves (*CN*, pp. 415, 409). The project of using up leftovers propels the narratives of Lear’s nonsense writing, keeping his characters busy, giving them a goal. His letter to Fortescue positions the “novel . . . Jam or Jelley,” which mashes together leftovers and waste, as itself a kind of “bosh”: as much a muddle of absurdities as his new book of nonsense. Nonsense, as a genre, brings together incongruous objects: Lear’s pairing of olives and crickets is first cousin to his “Ribands and pigs” (*CN*, p. 135), or Lewis Carroll’s “cabbages – and kings.”² It assimilates and redeploys the trivial, the everyday, the overlooked. Lighted upon by nonsense, abject things are at once framed as redundant, and reinvigorated with unforeseen potential.

The word “leftover” captures this simultaneity of uselessness and possibility. Calling something a leftover conveys both the tragedy of its present rejection, and invokes a future in which it will be reintegrated. One throws away scraps; one keeps leftovers for tomorrow.

Edward Lear is a poet of leftovers in precisely this sense. Using up his “spongetaneous” crickets is a way (as this essay argues first) of being industrious and dutiful. It minimises waste, and it tidies away everything unwanted. And yet that action, I will suggest, reveals the fissure in the Victorian cult of frugality: it keeps the abject substance in play, as something prominent and foregrounded. Lear’s poetics revolve around a bustling using-up of leftovers—but in doing so, they frame more acutely the astonishment of finding something still, starkly, remaining.³ That doubleness becomes key, finally, to rhyme’s operation in Lear’s limericks, such as “There was an Old Person of Brussels.” In his hands, the form becomes conflicted because it promises, but ultimately withholds, the coalescence of feelings and props into a successful event. The final surprise is that there is no surprise. After all the effort, the limericks offer up to us only what we started with: the final repetition of a word which has not quite undergone the meaningful change that we expect rhyme to offer. That transformation promised by rhyme is deferred, endlessly, in favour of an inert leftover which cannot be used up.

“Domestic (Or Drumstick) Economy”

Lear’s letter to Fortescue evokes his “Nonsense Cookery” (1876): a set of absurd recipes for delicacies such as “Amblongus Pie” and “Crumbobblious Cutlets.” Startling ingredients (“herring-bones,” “powdered gingerbread”) are subjected to impossible preparations (“having cut [the strips of beef] into the smallest possible slices, proceed to cut them still smaller”) (*CN*, pp. 249-50). All this is presided over by the gravely-patronising tones drawn from Eliza Acton’s *Modern Cookery* (1845) and *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management* (1861), bibles of resourceful Victorian housekeeping. As guilt and sympathy grew through the century for the plight of starving people near and far, these guides to housewifery evangelised about frugal, waste-free cooking.⁴ Alexis Soyer (1810-1858), cook and visionary, responded to the Irish famine by proposing culinary innovation:

the country produces plenty of vegetable and animal substances . . . 50 per cent. could be economised by a new system of preparation . . . let me, therefore, entreat you to take care that nothing is wasted in the way of food, either individually or collectively, by any family in the kingdom.⁵

Soyer was ambitious and enterprising, inventing everything from recipes to stoves, and he made it aspirational to use leftovers skilfully. In Soyer's *Modern Housewife* (1849), the model housewife Hortense's friends marvel at her economy: "We do not understand how it is that you make a nice little dish almost out of nothing."⁶ *Cassell's Book of the Household*, from 1890, stops short of recommending making jelly out of Lear's crickets, olives and castor-oil berries, but it transforms leftovers with a similar "sponge-taneity":

suppose the cook puts the bones on in the morning to make some soup for the early dinner: it can't be done. If, however, she puts these bones in an enamelled saucepan, lets them boil *all day*, adding water from time to time, and, when she goes to bed at night, leaves the saucepan still on the fire, with a saucer for a lid, she will find a quart of jelly ready for the early dinner for the *next* day. This is the way to true economy.⁷

As his faithful and prominent tracking of his meals in his diaries shows, Lear accepted leftovers as part of life. From 26-29 January 1869, for instance, he patiently ate various sorts of mutton, served up day after day from the same piece, and in fact thought the hashed mutton of the last day "excellent" (*D*, 29 January 1869). Indeed, Lear hit a sore spot when he innocently probed into Giorgio's housekeeping a few years later:

6.30 Dinner. G in one of his unaccountable black sulky fits [...] the only thing I can at all suppose – absurd as it is – might be that I remember having asked him if the guinea fowl were finished? – to which he said – "Why – it has lasted 4 days!" – And so it had, but if it had lasted 14 I don't remember – (as perhaps I ought,-) these details of domestic (or drumstick) economy. (*D*, 26 January 1872)

The management of leftovers feeds into questions of foresight, awareness and ingenuity. Giorgio takes offence at Lear's question because it implies that he has not spun the bird out frugally enough. Meanwhile, Lear reproves himself for his own failure to keep track: to be

aware of what is being eaten and when. Waste, as Alexis Soyer insists, is upsetting. Lear laments it in his “Alphabets”:

I was some Ice
Which was awfully nice,
But which nobody tasted
And so it was wasted.
i!
Very cold ice! (CN, p. 126)

The waste of good ice is a childhood calamity, and Lear’s work offers childhood solutions to these problems. His nonsense’s “domestic (or drumstick) economy” involves finding places for things which are left over: a way of using them up, putting them in play, making them part of something. That is to say, Lear’s work recycles foodstuffs into the stuff of nonsense. As early as his “Eclogue” (1825), a poem about the Lear family’s sad departure from Bowman’s Lodge, the misery of the house-move focuses on the question: “can we ever find / Half room enough for all these goods behind?” (CN, p. 3). Similarly, “The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World” revolves around the appropriate management of leftovers. Violet, Slingsby, Guy and Lionel travel like thrifty, managerial housewives, occupying themselves by managing scant resources. They churn salt-water to turn it into butter; they feed leftover fish-bones to the Pussy-cat (CN, pp. 220-21). When they reach a part of the sea which was “so entirely full of fishes that the boat could go on no further,” the children set about righting matters by eating up (nearly) all the fish (CN, p. 223). Narrative pleasure and resolution depend, here, on this colonial assimilation of the unused and the wasted, finding tidy ways to integrate them into a useful system.

Lear’s unlikely couples find similarly cosy destinations—romantic rather than culinary—in each other. Ducks and Kangaroos, Owls and Pussycats, enter surprising economies of two (CN, pp. 207, 238). Their incongruity means that they become, ironically, mutually appropriate, using each other up in a pair: from a spiky incongruity (like that of castor

oil berries and crickets), they transform into the smooth harmonious jelly of Learish nonsense or “bosh.” These ingenious mixtures balance between rebellion and conservatism: they neaten up the world even as they defy convention.

Busying oneself with the management of leftovers, then, is a complicated gesture: it performs adherence to social norms, protecting and smoothing social harmony even as it offers a fantasy of escape from social conventions. Formal mealtimes with guests could be excruciating for Lear, as his diaries show.⁸ He suffers through after-dinner singing so bad that “I had rather have had a tooth taken out” (*D*, 23 August 1869); he endures with guilty horror the “not enlivening” company of his godson, Percy Coombe (*D*, 21 August 1866); and he reacts with “agony” to low lights on a table (*D*, 26 June 1877). So when Lear asks Sir Wyatt in an undated letter to postpone dinner by half an hour, his self-deprecation reads more legibly as wistful longing:

[redacted]⁹

Lear draws a careful picture to accompany this bit of fooling. But his self-portrait, tucked neatly into the cosily-shaded darkness under the sideboard, looks not meek but contented in his large, saved chop. Arriving too late, Lear himself is a leftover from the party who cannot be absorbed into its activity. As he puts away the leftover chop, he tidies himself away too—under the sideboard—and social harmony proceeds undisturbed. There is a security in squirrelling oneself away from the “grim, grimy nonsense-talk” which goes on above, in the adult world of the dining-table (*D*, 7 January 1869).

[redacted]

Figure 1: self-portrait in letter to Sir Wyatt, undated. MS Eng 797, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Leftovers, and the eating of leftovers, therefore offer a kind of double comfort. The leftover itself becomes a consoling metaphor for the person who feels marginal, and the using-up of leftovers signifies the tidying of an obtrusive or overwhelming world (getting rid, for instance, of the alarming “sponge-taneously” generated crickets in one’s cellar, or a round landscape-painter who feels out-of-place at a party he has reached too late).

And yet Lear’s secure destinations, for the leftover and the marginal, prove themselves unreliable, temporary fantasies. When Lear writes a sequel to “The Owl and the Pussy-cat” he breaks up his famous couple. The unfinished poem is spoken by their children, “partly little beasts and partly little fowl,” who inform us that the Pussy died “long years ago.” The neat owl-cat pair gives way to an intergenerational muddle: the grieving “owly father” lives in a tree-hollow with his hybrid offspring (*CN*, p. 545). Lear sorted the world’s leftover creatures into a couple—but that couple itself disintegrated, leaving only leftovers whose heterogeneous composition means they can find no places of their own in the world.

That sense of being leftover, despite all poetic and narrative efforts to the contrary, lasts through Lear’s writing. His poetry often worries about being the odd one out, the stray which escapes the system’s tendency towards patterning. The third stanza of “Calico Pie” stages these anxieties through a mouse party:

Calico Ban,
The little Mice ran,
To be ready in time for tea,
Flippity flup,
They drank it all up,
And danced in the cup, –
But they never came back to me!
They never came back!
They never came back!
They never came back to me! (*CN*, p. 245)

Tea is served: the mice “dr[i]nk it all up,” devouring everything. Only the speaker is left over, lingering forlornly in the margins: “They never came back to me!” he laments through the poem. As in Tennyson’s “Mariana,” whose refrain recurs indefatigably in Lear’s diaries, this cry itself becomes a kind of leftover.¹⁰ Refrains, in poetry, stage the experience of progress stalled: all that emerges in the moment of refrain is something already known, startlingly unchanged. Lear’s “The Pelican Chorus” encodes this unassimilable remainderhood explicitly into its refrain: “We think so then, and we thought so still!” (*CN*, p. 412). Collapsing past and present in its reversed tenses, the line eliminates, in form and content, any possibility of alteration. It becomes a nugget which passes undigested through the poem, never lessening or being resolved.

Surprises: Lingering Leftovers

Such poetic leftovers, and leftover-feelings and -worries, persist throughout Lear’s writing. The busy frugality which often characterises his poetic enterprises—seeking to find a place for everything unused or lonely—reveals its underlying anxiety: the impossibility of using everything up properly, the inevitability of something, like those refrains, being left over by the end of the text. Victorian theatrics of frugal cookery (transforming bones miraculously into jelly, to the cook’s astonished delight) disguise an anxiety that leftovers were not actually being used up as they ought to be. Andrea Bloomfield describes how, as the nineteenth century progressed, servants increasingly could not cook. Their upbringings in city slums had deprived them of adequate home cooking facilities and the livestock which might otherwise dispose of scraps.¹¹ Eliza Acton and Alexis Soyer offer guidance for using up leftovers because they worry that, in fact, housewifery skills might be slipping, that the cycle of production and use was breaking down. Many of Lear’s food jokes capitalise on this worry, centring on the failure of

solemn cookery instructions to work, and ending with an injunction to throw away or abandon the result.¹² The economical jelly in *Cassell's Book of the Household* depends on an act of faith: that bones left overnight (like a hung-up Christmas stocking) will be “[ou]nd” transformed (spongetaneously, to quote Lear) from waste into a delicious treat. In Lear’s “Nonsense Cookery,” that faith collapses:

Take a Pig, three or four years of age, and tie him by the off-hind leg to a post. Place 5 pounds of currants, 3 of sugar, 2 pecks of peas, 18 roast chestnuts, a candle, and six bushels of turnips, within his reach; if he eats these, constantly provide him with more.

Then, procure some cream, some slices of Cheshire cheese, four quinces of foolscap paper, and a packet of black pins. Work the whole into a paste, and spread it out to dry on a sheet of clean brown waterproof linen. . . .

Visit the paste and beat the Pig alternately for some days, and ascertain if at the end of that period the whole is about to turn into Gosky Patties.

If it does not then, it never will; and in that case the Pig may be let loose, and the whole process may be considered as finished. (CN, pp. 250)

Cooks must bring together a bewildering range of solid, inedible and live ingredients into conjunction, and can then only wait on tenterhooks to “ascertain . . . if . . . the whole is about to turn into Gosky Patties.” Professor Bosh’s tone makes no promises. The whole process may have to be simply abandoned, just as his Amblongus Pie, in an earlier nonsense recipe, is good only to be thrown out of the window.¹³

The failure of Gosky Patties is a failure of coalescence. The ingredients—replete with pig and paste-covered linen—refuse to cohere (or jellify) into a single dish: the joke is that we cannot imagine how a pig and some sticky linen might turn spontaneously into a demure plate of patties. Such ingredients promise, in Lear, to cohere, but ultimately fail to do so. In his illustrations for “Sing a Song of Sixpence” (c. 1852), he draws the queen eating honey with a huge spoon from a jar or bowl (labelled HONEY) and bread (labelled, in the first case, BREAD). Not honey spread on bread? Lear keeps the ingredients apart to signify that this meal

does not “count.” This is a secretive, impulsive snack, rather than a proper dinner: something rather illicit and chaotic, without trouble even taken to put bread and honey together.¹⁴ The ingredients – larder staples, scavenged between mealtimes – have failed to come together. On the page, they scream out their discrete status.

[redacted]

Figure 2: drawing in ‘Mrs Beadon Scrapbook’, MS Typ 55.23, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

As these incohesive recipes hint, Victorian anxieties about frugality encode a double vision: leftovers loom largest and most nightmarishly present in the act of trying to use them up. Neat mixtures of otherwise-waste foods promise cohesion, but in practice the result is not a single dish but a chaotic collection of too-solid parts. During Lear’s travels, he dwells on shocking meals which do not properly assimilate their abject ingredients:

Paradiso cookery appeared to delight in singular experiments and materials. At one time a dish was exhibited full of roasted squirrels, adorned by funghi of wonderful shapes and colours; at another, there were relays of most surprising birds: among which my former ornithological studies caused me to recognise a few corvine mandibles, whose appearance was not altogether in strict accordance with the culinary arrangements of polite society.¹⁵

The corvid beaks—previously seen and recognised again here—pop up again in the dish, a monstrous revenant, or remnant, from a previous existence. Lear’s focus on the beaks leads his readers to imagine these “mandibles” poking out grotesquely and inedibly, as though pecking their way back into a world which they did not reliably exit the first time. Food is often too sharply present, for Lear: too surprising in its protrusion into human existence. He engineers a focus on food items which demands intense attention to them, even though we do not know how to assimilate them into—to use them up in—a sense of overall significance. Though the

ice in Lear's alphabet was wasted, we learn, the stanza ends with "Very cold ice!" In other words, he ends the text with the sensuous quality of the ice on the tongue. It lingers on, startling and tactile, even after it has melted away untasted.

The intensity of food experiences means that, for Lear, leftover ingredients put into a dish are too painfully individuated. So, in his diaries, are leftover dishes themselves. One instance occurs at the end of 1872. Usually so complimentary about Giorgio's cooking, his optimism begins to flag as the Christmas plum-pudding repeats on him:

29 December

Dinner, Maccaroni, grilled Lamb & mashed potatoes - & fried plum pudding!!

30 December

Dinner, 6.30 – macaroni, perfect roast mutton & turnips, & fried pudding, wh. last I eat because G has made it – but had rather not.

31 December

Dinner Maccaroni, excellentest lamb & mashed potatoes, & that fried pudding! – oh! that it were finished! (*D*, 29-31 December 1872)

The very familiarity of this unending pudding elicits a kind of despairing surprise, as Lear holds out the plum pudding to the reader on perplexed exclamation-marks. Over his diaries of December 1879 and January 1880, he tracks the recurrence of a "surprising leg of mutton" at dinnertime for nine days. This is food startling in its prominent survival, growing more mesmerising and unignorable as one continues to use it up. Lear's "Growling Eclogue" condemns a piece of mutton to be progressively "cold, stewed, minced, hashed," in the best tradition of Victorian frugality: the same meat reappearing at meal after meal in different guises. Both the character Edwardus (standing in for Lear himself) and reader are unable to take their eye off the mutton: it just will not go away, offering itself up endlessly to be eaten (*CN*, p. 236). Lear's writing returns to these impossible acts of trying to use up leftovers – acts which magnify the remnants rather than tidying them away.

Rhymes and Leftovers

Lear's attempts to recuperate leftovers end up foregrounding the leftover. They leave it dangling and obtruding, surprising in its miraculous persistence. Though his own meals serve up leftovers with dreary predictability, his near-daily logging grants them an emphasis out of keeping with both their inconsequence and their repetitive nature. Despite the recurrence of Giorgio's mutton and plum-pudding, Lear tends towards hyperbolic enthusiasm for dinner. "Uniquely good," he enthuses. "Super excellent" (*D*, 5 January 1870; 13 January 1878). When Lear seems less certain about Giorgio's cooking, he often describes it, more ambiguously, as surprising: "surprising fried liver and broccoli," "soup and surprising mince" (*D*, 6 January 1869; 10 January 1871). Food may or may not be good, but it is "surprising," like the leg of mutton that lasts nine days. It startles the person whose day it carves up, protruding itself.

Food's power to draw attention means that it often offers a structure for Lear's writing, and, further, a key to the narrative operations of his limericks. The limerick builds to a climax in the third line (as usually printed): two rapid rhymes outline either a dilemma coming to its crisis, or the characters testing a resolution for their problems. In the case of the "Old Person of Pett," for instance, the Old Person eases his regret in the third line by sitting and stuffing himself with leftovers:

There was an Old Person of Pett,
Who was partly consumed by regret;
He sate in a cart, and ate cold apple tart,
Which relieved that Old Person of Pett. (*CN*, p. 357)

"Cart" and "tart" offer both parts of a two-pronged response, served up swiftly to lead to at least a part-resolution (of this *partly*-consuming regret) which, thanks to its rhyme, the reader already expected. This is just one of so many limericks in which the dilemma being tackled

and resolved centres on food. Lear uses food as the rhyme-word, emphasised by the amphibrachic stress of the line's tetrameter. The old man who purchases a bear "played on some *trumpets*, and fed upon *crumpets*"; the Old Person of Leeds "sat on a *stool*, and ate gooseberry *fool*" (CN, pp. 113, 164). Food offers Lear's limericks not only opportunities for event, but in fact for climax. It provides material for the poem's most urgent and active moments, in which characters take decisive action to tackle their problems.

In his pictures, Lear insists on the precise food in question: the only respect in which his drawings admit no ambiguity. As I have described, his nursery rhyme illustrations are finicky about labelling the "BREAD" and the "HONEY"; so indeed are most of Lear's food pictures. The Old Person of Brussels, fuelled to violence by brandy and mussels, punches a person with his right hand. With his left, he brandishes a bottle and a bowl of shells. We might think it was clear, in the light of the poem, what these contained, but Lear leaves us in no doubt: he labels them "Brandy" and "Mussels" with the insistent emphasis of the cake in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* labelled "EAT ME" (CN, p. 378).

Not only does Lear underline food through its position as rhyme, then reinscribes it with scrupulous labels in the pictures. He thrusts food out towards us, waving it aggressively like the Old Person of Brussels, making it impossible to ignore.

Lear's rhymes offer the same insistent emphasis. A rhyming word tends to enjoy a special, underlined status. Because of this visibility, as Peter McDonald notes, rhyme provides sequence and order: a kind of checkpoint in a text's journey. The poem moves from "one thing to another, from one sound to its partner."¹⁶ In other words, rhymes offer a text the junctures of event. Rhymes provide the machinery which enables things to happen in any poem, but particularly in Lear's limericks, whose manuscripts support the suspicion that their narratives are entirely dictated by the rhymes he can find for his chosen place-names.¹⁷

Even as Lear's narratives rely on rhymes, however, his limerick-structure limits and concentrates their scope for offering plot. While nonsense forebears such as *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (1823) often end the limerick with a new rhyme, Lear consistently bookends his limericks with a repetition of the initially-stated place name ("Dover," "Fife," "Narkunda") in the final line.¹⁸ Limited to reminding his readers of the place in question, the first and last rhymes can offer little to the limerick's narrative. Having excluded them from a substantial role in the plot, Lear's limericks only really have three rhyme words to play with—that which ends the second line, and the two in the third line—to provide the structuring power that McDonald describes.¹⁹ So drastic action is needed: some rapid twists from focus to focus, to make something actually happen within this tiny compass. Precisely because food is so surprising in Lear (so pleasurable, so startling and interesting, offering the chance both to elicit and to satisfy appetite), it represents material dramatic enough to do justice to the limerick's most condensed rhyme-pair, and fulfil the responsibility of offering event. The three central rhymes offer the poems narrative apparatus, which is sharpened by his use of food as the subject.

It is this use of rhymes, as technology for a frenzied and condensed processing of poetic plot, that reveals the stakes of Lear's tension between using things up and leaving a residue. His rhymes are the site at which the two tendencies intersect: emphatically embodying a process of assimilation, before staging and spotlighting an indigestible residue. Rhymes, like nonsense, bring incongruous things into harmony. W. K. Wimsatt describes how the "surprise" of rhyme—something not anticipated, an inherent unlikelihood—makes it, in fact, fit snugly: "the greater the difference in meaning between rhyme words the more marked and the more appropriate will be the binding effect."²⁰ In the limericks, food protrudes at the points of rhyme: surprising, unassimilable, excessive. And this very incongruity, for Wimsatt, domesticates it into the rhyme. "Snakes" and "cakes" have nothing in common: nevertheless, cooked into a

pair by rhyme, they offer a recipe for consolation for the Old Man of Carlisle, stranded on his desolate isle (*CN*, p. 380). Lear assimilates food into something appropriate, brings it home.

In his limericks, however, Lear ultimately uses rhyme—more exactly, the failure of rhyme—as a way of drawing attention to something left over. By the time we get to that final line—an unchanging restatement of place—things seem less satisfactorily tied up. The third line has accommodated two rhyming words in quick succession (“snakes” and “cakes,” for instance, or “cart” and “tart”). If rhymes make things happen, as McDonald implies, then the third line concentrates the plot of the text. It acts as the most crucial organ in the poem’s digestive system: it organises crisis, resolution, despair. By the time the fourth line emerges, it feels like a final result, extruded from this churning of rhymes. And if it feels like a result—an output—then its own failure to rhyme, in favour of repetition, is significant. Jean Baudrillard describes rhyme in terms of consumption. If, for James Fenton, a rhyme is a question and answer,²¹ for Baudrillard rhyme is more like a piece of food, offered and meticulously eaten up, leaving no residue. He says, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*: “a good poem is one where nothing is left over, where all the phonemic material in use is consumed.”²² Lear’s limericks end almost exclusively on the initial word. In so doing, they raise questions of what precisely is left over. On one hand, this repetition seems to lock the poem into the same space in which it started: the limerick models a neat going-full-circle, tidied up at the end with nothing remaining. On the other hand, even though the initial word has gone through the text’s industrial-poetic process, it itself emerges unchanged. It has not been successfully processed or digested. It remains excessive, more present than it should be; it persists when it should have been consumed: a leftover. This leftover resisted consumption. It is served up again, though neither “nice nor nutritious,” and we still do not know how to go about eating it.

Lear’s limerick form depends, then, on this interplay between frenetic process and an all-too-familiar result. A mode which should be easily digestible—light verse, like a light

meal—proves itself resistant. What is finally extruded cannot be moved past: the limerick has staged a failure to tidy something away. And these impassable remnants keep turning up: the same place names recur over and over again in Lear's limericks: Narkunda, Skye, the Dee, the West. These portentously capitalised locations coincide heavily with the stresses of Lear's metre. They linger, bulkily, till the end of the poem, and through Lear's oeuvre as he reuses them in limerick after limerick, in the face of the efforts that every individual poem stages to use them up narratively. Their survival tips back and forth between delightful and disconcerting. Lear's leftover aesthetic elicits unease alongside the laughter. As his nonsense juggles merrily with leftovers, we hear a ghostly cry echoing back from Lear's own diary, as he grappled with a pudding which could not be used up: "oh! that it were finished."

¹ Vivien Noakes, *Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 251.

² Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 164.

³ James Williams hints at this inevitably-failing struggle to find a place for everything when he notes how "When leaving this beautiful blessed Briánza," a poem about choosing two books out of three to take on a trip, involves a sense of loss; the speaker must decide "Which to leave out? Which thing doesn't fit?" James Williams, *Edward Lear* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2018), p. 79.

⁴ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 17-19.

⁵ Alexis Soyer, *Soyer's Charitable Cookery, or, The Poor Man's Regenerator* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1847), p. 10.

⁶ Alexis Soyer, *The Modern Housewife or Ménagère* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1851), p. 28.

⁷ *Cassell's Book of the Household*, vol. 4 (London, 1889-91), p. 255.

⁸ On Lear's torturous dinners at Knowsley Hall, see Jenny Uglow, *Mr Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), p. 77.

⁹ Edward Lear, letter to Sir Wyatt, undated. MS Eng 797, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁰ See, for instance, *D*, 13 August 1870; 8 May 1871.

¹¹ Andrea Bloomfield, *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), p. 51.

¹² On the lack of an outcome in Lear's nonsense recipes, see Angelika Zirker, "Don't Play with Your Food? – Edward Lear's Nonsense Cookery and Limericks," in *The Pleasures and Horrors of Eating: The Cultural History of Eating in Anglophone Literature*, eds. Marion Gymnich and Norbert Lennartz (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2010), p. 242.

¹³ For an amusing counterpart, see the manuscript of the alphabet drawn for Miss Lushington (MS Typ 55.3, Houghton Library, Harvard University). Behind the picture of a pudding can faintly be seen the outline of a pig. Lear apparently changed his mind. On this occasion, at least, the pig turned into a pudding.

¹⁴ Edward Lear, Mrs Beadon Scrapbook, MS Typ 55.23, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁵ Edward Lear, *Edward Lear's Journals: A Selection*, ed. Herbert van Thal (London: Arthur Barker, 1952), p. 104.

¹⁶ Peter McDonald, *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 29.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Edward Lear, 'There was an old man of Siberia', Edward Lear miscellaneous drawings, MS Typ 55.14 (78), Houghton Library, Harvard University. Lear gets "Siberia" and "dreamier" into place in the limerick first: a skeleton to be fleshed out.

¹⁸ See *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (London: E. Marshall, 1823).

¹⁹ I describe these rhymes following Noakes' convention; Lear did not always lay the limericks out thus in drafts and proofs.

²⁰ W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1954), p. 164.

²¹ James Fenton, *An Introduction to English Poetry* (London: Viking, 2002), p. 72.

²² Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (Sage Publications, London, 1993), p. 200.